

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Earle Christoph, 87, retired schoolteacher, bandmaster, and musician

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Earle Christoph, Caucasian, was born on April 24, 1897, in Waukesha, Wisconsin. His father at various times worked as a grocer, hotelman, cotton plantation manager, and farmer. As a consequence of his father's occupational changes, Earle grew up in Wisconsin, Virginia, and Louisiana.

Earle attended Carroll College in his hometown and the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He served with an artillery unit in France during World War I and returned there in the post-war years to pursue his study of music.

He re-enlisted in the U.S. Army during the depression and came to the islands as a serviceman in 1934. In 1935, he entered the teaching profession. During the next twenty odd years he taught at Kalakaua Intermediate, Farrington High, and Stevenson Intermediate. In 1958, he left Stevenson Intermediate to become the Royal Hawaiian Bandmaster.

Retired since 1963, Earle still resides in the Kalihi Valley home that he built during World War II.

Tape No. 11-37-1-84

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Earle Christoph (EC)

February 16, 1984

Kalihi Valley, Oahu

BY: Michiko Kodama (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Earle Christoph at his home in Kalihi Valley, Oahu on February 16, 1984.

Okay. I want to start today's interview with you by having you tell me when you were born and where were you born.

EC: I was born in Waukesha, Wisconsin, April 24, 1897.

MK: Can you tell me how to spell the name of your birthplace?

EC: W-A-U-K-E-S-H-A.

MK: In your family at that time, how many children were there in all?

EC: Including my uncles' families?

MK: Just in your family itself. Your brothers and sisters.

EC: I had (two) sister(s). I had lots of cousins.

MK: Were they all living nearby?

EC: (Yes), all living in the town. One of my uncles had a family (of) ten children. I have a picture taken with a ladder leaning up against the barn and the boys are climbing up the ladder. And I'm on the bottom, the youngest (chuckles) one.

MK: So, the community that you lived in was what sort of community?

EC: Well, Waukesha was a famous place for spring water and hotels. It was a summer resort. And there wasn't much else there. It's a farming community around there. There was two breweries and several cheese factories because there was dairy farming all around that part of the country. But it was a famous place. People came from all over, especially from the South, during the summer. Many of them came in their automobiles, so it was a famous place for beautiful

cars in the olden days. Now the city has changed. There (are) quite a few factories there now.

MK: How large a population did that town have?

EC: At that time, it was about 15,000.

MK: What was your father's name?

EC: Paul.

MK: And your mother's name?

EC: Ida. Ida Mae.

MK: Based on what you've heard, tell me about your father's family background.

EC: My father's family came from Germany. Silesia. Way on the Czechoslovakian border. It is now Poland. The oldest son came to the United States first. When he had made enough money, he sent for another brother until they all came over. And then, they finally sent for the father and mother, and built a house for them. On the other side, the family was much older on my mother's side. They lived in Waukesha, too. My grandfather on my mother's side was a soldier in the Civil War. He was a master mason, and he had charge of building three of the churches in my home town. They were using the local limestone.

My father was the first in the grocery business. And then, we went into the hotel business. From there, we went to Virginia, came back, and went in another grocery business, and then went to Louisiana where my father was a manager of a big plantation. Cotton plantation.

MK: Why is it that your father was involved in so many different types of occupations?

EC: Well, he loved the country and the land and always went back to that. Then we also went farming in Wisconsin. So I had lots of experience (in many lines).

MK: Of all the occupations that your father was involved in, which one did you as a child value the most?

EC: I think when he took over a drugstore. I think that was the most interesting.

MK: What made that so interesting to you?

EC: Well, the drugstore was three stories. In those days, they sold lots of liquor and that all came in bulk by the barrel and had to be

bottled. That was one of my jobs, the bottling. (Laughs) And [it was an] old-fashioned drugstore. On both sides, there was a shelf with all the glass pharmacy jars all with the Latin names. The business was different (from a modern) pharmacy. Everything was prescription, not so much ready-made. Most of the prescriptions were made up by the pharmacist. It also had other things. Some notions. But it was an interesting business, anyway.

MK: You mentioned that your father also managed a Louisiana cotton plantation. Can you tell me about that experience?

EC: Well, a man in my home town owned the plantation, and he wanted somebody to go down to watch his interests. When we went down there the original owners were still living there. It was a rather wild life because there was a feud of some kind, and the original owners never stepped outside of the house without carrying a gun. The brother of the owner was killed in this feud. And they were expecting more trouble. They just opened a window and (shot) a shotgun out the window if they heard anything outside. That's (chuckles) the kind of life it was.

My sister and I had to ride horseback to school about six miles, and we had to swim our horses across a bayou. (Chuckles) The schoolhouse was an old Negro cabin that actually went back to Civil War days. A one-room school with all the grades in this one room. I remember the textbooks. The textbooks were written with the confederacy in mind, biased toward the confederacy. I wished I could have kept one of (the texts) because they're quite unusual, I think, to have one now (would be a curiosity).

We were there several years. My father introduced other crops. Before that, they raised nothing but cotton. He put in corn, wheat, barley. And we had made our own molasses. Raised the sugar cane and pressed it with a mill operated by a horse that went round and round. They boiled the syrup down in big kettles outside and made molasses.

MK: As for the labor on the plantation, who supplied the labor?

EC: There were seventy-five families. Seventy-five (Black) families on the place. There were no tractors or anything like that. Everything was mules. I think they had about 200 mules. It did have a cotton gin. That was operated with a steam engine.

MK: Those [Black] families that you mentioned, were they connected with the plantation from way back when?

EC: Well, they had a system. You might call it peonage. (The families) were contracted each year for their labor. It was always arranged so they were in debt. So they couldn't leave without paying their debt. So, they were really tied down to the plantation.



MK: Since you came from the Wisconsin area to Louisiana, and there were not many [Blacks] living up in Wisconsin . . .

EC: No, only one or two families in my home town. That went back to Civil War time, because my home town was on the underground railroad during the Civil War. And this family came there during the Civil War.

MK: Since you only knew, say, two families of Blacks previously . . .

EC: Yes, (in my home town. In Virginia we knew many Black families.)

MK: . . . what were your feelings about living in Louisiana and having your father manage this plantation where there were so many Black workers?

EC: We got along very nicely. My sister Adele had a nurse. We lived in this big plantation house. We had two cooks, a washerwoman, a hostler, two stable boys, and two houseboys, a milkmaid. I think that's it for servants. It was altogether a different life than (chuckles) living in Wisconsin.

MK: What did you think of this new lifestyle in Louisiana?

EC: Oh, it was nice. I had my own horse. My sister had a pony. We were able to go riding all over on the plantation. I used to go hunting. It was a nice life.

MK: You mentioned also that your father was a farmer in Virginia?

EC: Yes, we had a farm in Virginia.

MK: How was that lifestyle? And what did you do on the farm?

EC: I couldn't go to school while I was there because school was too far away. And then, I got malaria so they shipped me north back to Wisconsin where I lived with my grandmother till I got rid of the malaria. But I liked it there. (In Virginia) we were right on a river with an Indian reservation right next to us. I used to go fishing with the Indians and play with the Indian kids. It was a nice life. Of course, I didn't have to go to school.

(Laughter)

MK: You mentioned that your father was also a hotel man in your home town that was . . .

EC: Yes. We owned a summer hotel.

MK: How was that business run and what was your involvement in that hotel?

EC: Well, I was going to school at the time. We lived in the hotel. It was closed during the winter, and we lived in the hotel during the winter. It was a strictly summer hotel, like most of the hotels in Waukesha. I think there was only one or two that were open the year around.

MK: If it was just a summer hotel, how did your father support the family during the winter?

EC: He didn't do anything. As I remember. (Except maintenance around the hotel.) So we had lot of experiences.

MK: You sure did. I was wondering, what was your mother's role in the family during all these different experiences?

EC: Well, my mother often, when we were in business, she used to act as bookkeeper. We always had a cook at home. (My mother had) had a business of her own before she got married.

MK: What sort of business was she in before she got married?

EC: She had a candy business. Confectionery.

MK: Was it usual for a woman of that time to have a business of her own prior to marriage?

EC: It was rather unusual, I'd say, yeah.

MK: Going back to your home town in Wisconsin, can you describe for me the house that you lived in?

EC: We lived in a street that had beautiful maple trees covering the whole street. It was a four-bedroom house--two-story, wood-frame house. And then, in the back we had a stable. When we were in the grocery business, we had horses there, till later on we get trucks instead of the horses. My grandmother lived in a brick cottage that dated back before the Civil War. Beautiful little cottage. But that street is all changed now. The trees have all been cut down and it just looks terrible now. It was a beautiful place.

I took up clarinet while I was going to high school and got very interested in it. I played with a local band, and orchestra. I studied in Milwaukee and Chicago. So I was playing professionally when I was eighteen years old.

MK: Gee. So, your interest in music began very early.

EC: Oh, yes. My father had a fine voice. He studied, but he took up voice study too late in life. If he had done it younger, I'm sure he would have gone to the top. In fact, I played in an orchestra when he was a soloist. That was kind of unusual. He was very much interested in opera. He used to go to the opera in Chicago

during the season almost every week when he could. He was an opera fan.

MK: Back in your home town, what sort of community activities were there that you and your family participated in?

EC: Well, there were several clubs. That's mostly all I can think of.

MK: How about concerts, and recitals, and theater?

EC: (The theater often showed road shows, musicals, etc.) Well, we used to get Chautauqua in the summer, and lectures and recitals and things like that during the winter. But we were right near Milwaukee. They had streetcars that went to Milwaukee. There was everything there in the way of theaters. The pops theater in Milwaukee had a stock company from Germany, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra played concerts in Milwaukee every season. So we were able to go there. So it was quite an interesting place as far as entertainment was concerned. And then, the summer (in Waukesha), the largest hotel, the Fountain House, had a twenty-five piece orchestra. They played a concert every evening. People used to go there and listen to the concerts in the evening. And then, one of the parks had an orchestra playing in the daytime. This, of course, all during the summer.

MK: So, as a youth, as an eighteen year old, what sort of groups were you playing with?

EC: Oh, I played with the local band and orchestra at school. And then, later on, after I became a Shriner, I played with the Shrine band in Milwaukee.

MK: As a youth, what were your ambitions? Your professional ambitions at that time?

EC: To become a doctor. I did my pre-medic studies, Carroll College and the University of Wisconsin. Then I had to give it up.

MK: Why did you have to give up that ambition?

EC: Well, my father died, and I didn't see my way clear. I didn't have the money to go on to medical school. And I was making good money anyway because I was teaching while I was going to the University [of Wisconsin]. Teaching at a conservatory and playing in a theater. I was making good money. I didn't see my way clear to go to medical school.

MK: I noticed that earlier you attended Carroll College. Where was that located?

EC: Waukesha, Wisconsin, my home town.

MK: What type of college was Carroll College?

EC: A general college. A general course. Recently, they put in a nursing course, just this year, I believe.

MK: While you were at Carroll College, what were your major fields of study?

EC: Oh, I was taking pre-med, yes.

MK: How did you keep up with your musical studies while still in college?

EC: Oh, I was able to do that.

MK: Were you taking courses then or just studying by yourself?

EC: No, I was studying clarinet at the same time. I managed to get in my practicing. (Laughs)

MK: What year did you graduate from Carroll College?

EC: I didn't graduate. I transferred to the University of Wisconsin.

MK: And you continued your pre-medic studies at Wisconsin?

EC: (Yes.)

MK: I know that World War I came along. Were you still at the University of Wisconsin when World War I came?

EC: No, I was at Carroll College.

MK: At Carroll College?

EC: Carroll College, (yes). I enlisted before the year was over. And then we were called into service. (After the war), I came back and went back to Carroll for a year. And during the summer, I got a telephone call from the theater in Madison. That's where the University [of Wisconsin] is. They wanted to know if I could come to work in the theater. So, I grabbed my instruments and suitcase and just made the train.

(Laughter)

MK: What kind of work did you do at that theater?

EC: Played in the orchestra. That was vaudeville, stage plays, musical comedies. Shows came on tour, you know. And movies.

MK: During those days, who were the major stars in the vaudeville and stage shows?



EC: Oh, my. (Ralph Bellamy, Melvyn Douglas, Ballet Russe, Vatican Choir.) Lot of them are dead now. (Laughs)

MK: You mentioned that movies also played there. When movies played at the theater, what was the role of the orchestra? Entertainment?

EC: Well, they were silent movies. We played all the time during the movies. Often, they had regular scores that came with the film. Cued right into the action, you know. Oh, yeah. Then we had the regular road shows, musical comedies. And vaudeville.

MK: That sounds really interesting.

EC: It was.

MK: You know, you mentioned World War I very briefly. Can you tell me what outfit you were connected with in World War I?

EC: I started out with First Wisconsin Calvary. We were supposed to be mounted. And then they did away with the mounted bands. We were changed to artillery. I went to France with the artillery. With the band, you know. I got gassed and burned, and I never got back to my outfit again. I got to (a) hospital in the southern part of France and the chief surgeon there (chuckles) wanted to be a conductor. So he--all the patients that could play--kept them there in the hospital. All we did was rehearse so he could use the baton.

(Laughter)

EC: He even bought an instrument for me. Gave me the money to go to town, buy a clarinet. And I could have stayed there the rest of the war, but you only drew hospital pay. That was only six dollars a month. And I got kinda tired of it, so I got shipped out of there and I ended up in a casual depot and got caught in the band there until they closed the camp. Finally got back. (Pause) When I got back, I went back to Carroll. I went back in French class. I was there a week and the teacher says, "I'm going to put you in second year French." (Chuckles) Because I studied all the time I was in France. The first camp we went to in Wisconsin, they had a French teacher. Oh, about a hundred men came the first night. Second night, about ten. And when we got to this camp in France, they had two French teachers giving classes there. They couldn't speak English, but they both spoke German and I speak German. So we conducted (chuckles) our class in French and German when we got stuck. They used to come pick me up in the evening and we'd go off together. Go outside the camp and go to a place and have some beer, you know. So I got good training in French.

MK: Ah. That's how---plus your being stationed in France.

EC: And I carried a little dictionary with me all the time. Whenever I'd see anything I didn't know what it was, I'd ask somebody. Especially

children because they like to tell you. (Chuckles) So I had a good background in French.

MK: During World War I, what were your feelings toward the war itself?

EC: Well, it wasn't very nice. We acted as stretcher-bearers, you know, which isn't a good job. Because whenever everybody else goes in hiding, you got to run out with (laughs) a stretcher.

MK: So, how long were you with the Army during World War I?

EC: About three years.

MK: Then coming back to Carroll College . . .

EC: (Yes), went back to college.

MK: . . . University of Wisconsin.

EC: Then to University.

MK: After the University of Wisconsin, you continued your studies. Can you tell me what you did to continue your studies?

EC: I went to Europe to study clarinet. I went to Belgium and France to study clarinet.

MK: Who did you study with or where did you study?

EC: (I studied with private teachers in Brussels and Paris.) In Belgium, I studied with a solo clarinetist with the First Regiment of Guides. The Queen's band. He also played in the theater. Theatre de la Monnaie. That was opera. And then, I went to Paris and studied with a private teacher there.

MK: How long were you abroad?

EC: That time? About a year.

MK: As you studied and lived abroad, what did you notice as being the major difference between Americans like yourself at that time and these Europeans?

EC: Well, I think the French were more polite. Because you always tipped your hat even to your good friends when you met them first time of the day, and shook hands. Every day, you know. But I liked France very much. Lots of people don't like to travel there, but I did. Then I went back in 1925 to study. And I went into Germany. One of my cousins came over, and we had relatives in Germany. We went and visited them in Germany. That was during the Weimar Republic before Hitler got a start. Conditions were very bad then.

- MK: In those days, were there many Americans like yourself abroad?
- EC: Not so very many. Because we were there during the occupation when the French were occupying the Rhineland.
- MK: After you went to France again and continued studying, what did you do after you completed all your musical studies?
- EC: I went back in the theater. Played in the theater.
- MK: As the depression years approached, what did you do?
- EC: Well, I went to Florida. Awfully hard to find work, so I re-enlisted in the Army. I wanted to take the bandmaster's examination. I was there six years and they didn't give the examination once during that six years till I got out, about a month later. (Chuckles)
- MK: What were your actual duties in the Army during those six years?
- EC: Play in the band.
- MK: As you were in Army, what areas were you stationed in?
- EC: I was stationed in Fort Monroe, Virginia.
- (Someone calls EC. Taping stops, then resumes.)
- MK: As you were a member of the Army, what other areas besides Fort Monroe were you stationed at?
- EC: Fort Monroe. Then in order to come over here, I had to come over unassigned. And they sent me to the infantry. Then I transferred to Fort Kam. Fort Kamehameha. That was back to the coast artillery.
- MK: I know that you came to Hawaii with the Army in 1934.
- EC: Yes.
- MK: What were your first impressions of Hawaii back then?
- EC: Well, the first, we got off of the transport and we took the train at the old railroad station down here. It was so interesting to go by train. Train wound around, you know. Little narrow-gauged train. It looked so different from anywhere I'd been before. With all the cane fields and the pineapple (chuckles) and all that, it was so strange. That made quite an impression on me.
- MK: How about meeting the local people for the first couple of times? What were your impressions of the people . . .
- EC: Well, I met lots of people on account of playing in the symphony, you know. So, I got acquainted with people. And then, I had some

friends here, too. I had one fraternity brother from Wisconsin who had the band at McKinley. So, I had lots of friends here.

MK: Could you describe for me what you remember most about Hawaii of 1934.

EC: I remember the (chuckles) quiet traffic, the streetcars, and going out to Waikiki on the streetcar past all of the duck ponds and swamps (chuckles) and shacks. It's altogether different now.

MK: Did you ever venture out into this area of Honolulu, the Kalihi area, back in 1934?

EC: No, not quite that. Little later I did. Came out here. Because the next property [in Kalihi Valley] was owned by one of teachers at Farrington [High School].

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: While you were not doing your Army--working with the Army band or whatever in 1934--you mentioned that you participated in the symphony and chamber music. Can you talk about that musical endeavor of yours?

EC: Yes. I played with the Leebrick Quartet. We played (works) with clarinet. Then I had sonata recitals at the Art Academy. We gave a series of concerts for the children there.

MK: You mentioned the Leebrick Quartet?

EC: He was the concertmaster of the orchestra.

MK: When you played with the symphony back in those days, where did they generally hold their concerts?

EC: Their concerts were given at the Princess Theater. And we rehearsed at Central School.

MK: How was the attendance back in those days?

EC: Oh, it was good. Yes. It was good.

MK: How many members were there in the symphony?

EC: About sixty, at that time. Fritz Hart was the conductor.

MK: Were they all paid members of the symphony or volunteers?

EC: There were some union players. The others were paid.

MK: What were the highlights of the symphony's year back then?



EC: Well, Fritz Hart was an Englishman from Australia. So, we played a lot of English music. (Laughs) Of course. That's when I first played Delius. We played quite a bit of Delius.

MK: Were most of the symphony members from the Mainland, like yourself . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Can you repeat for me the types of people who were members of the symphony back then? You were saying that there were quite a few from the Mainland . . .

EC: Yes.

MK: . . . and . . .

EC: Local people. More haoles than anything.

MK: I know that in the following year, 1935, you started teaching at Kalakaua Intermediate School. Can you explain to me how and why you got into that line of work?

EC: Well, the son of one of the sergeants in the band at Fort Kam had the scout troop at Kalakaua. And one Saturday, he asked if I'd like to go along. He had to go down to see the principal there. So I went with him and Mr. Vance, Tom Vance, just to make conversation, he asked me what I was doing. I told him I was playing in the--- sergeant in the band at Fort Kam. He says, "We need a band teacher here." He says, "Are you qualified?"

I says, "Yes."

He says, "Can you come to work tomorrow?"

I said, "No." (Chuckles) "I have to get out of the Army." It took me two weeks to get out of the Army. That's how I got the job.

MK: What did Kalakaua look like back then?

EC: One building. The largest frame building in the Territory. A firetrap. That's all there was, one building.

MK: What did the Kalihi town look like back then, in that vicinity of Kalakaua?

EC: Across from where Farrington is now, that was part of Kam School. There was no housing there then. We took over the old stone buildings. And then there was a chapel on the other side and some other buildings. And they were all torn down. But we were in temporary buildings

during the war [i.e., World War II], you know. Because during the war, we had to move out of the school, what is now the main building. That was turned into a hospital.

MK: You're talking about Farrington High School?

EC: Yes, Farrington.

MK: Before we get into Farrington, I want to stay on the topic of your years at Kalakaua [Intermediate School]. While at Kalakaua, what did you teach?

EC: I only taught band in Kalakaua. Full time band, that's all.

MK: How were the students at Kalakaua?

EC: (Laughs) Different than they are now. Altogether different. I remember a short time after I started there, one little boy came up after school, stood in the doorway with a big grin on his face, with his hands behind him. He showed me a paddle he made in shop. He wanted me to use it. They just loved to see somebody get a paddling.

(Laughter)

EC: The shop teacher [and the boys there]. Every afternoon, they formed a big circle outside and he had great big boxing gloves. Great big--you couldn't hurt anybody with them, they were so soft. They had a match there every day. (Laughs) And he carried a paddle in his hand all the time.

MK: How often did you practice corporal punishment or paddling?

EC: I didn't have to do it very often. You soon get a reputation, see. The word got around that the new band teacher was a tough guy. That's all it took. (Laughs)

MK: You've mentioned one teacher, so far, the shop teacher. How were your fellow teachers? Who were they back then? I've heard of a James Mitchell.

EC: Oh, Mitchell. He had the most perfect control over all those kids you ever saw. He never raised his voice. I never saw anything like it, the control he had. There was no trouble there. (Chuckles)

MK: What do you think made him such a good disciplinarian back then?

EC: Well, he was a big man and there was no nonsense. And then we had a mechanical drawing teacher. You would go in that room, you could hear a pin drop. You never saw anything like it. Everybody working. (Chuckles) And he had control, too. But now, I don't think I'd like to be teaching there now.

MK: Who were some of the other teachers that you remember?

EC: (Maria Louise Abel, Jean Aitken, Naomi Aiwohi, Lillian Ashford, Lorna Burger, Helen Cunningham, Walter Duris, Amy Fern, Henrietta Freitas, Irene Jackson, Tin Yau Goo, Milton Gordon, Ralph Geiser, Akiyoshi Hayashida, Bert Itoga, Myrtle Kaapu, Uichi Kanayama, Edith Keen, Henry Kusunoki, Mitsuyuki Kido, Elsie Lam, Eunice McCain, Frances Otremba, Alexander Parker, Fred Ployhart, John Reinecke, Helen Schonhard, Lydia Wright, Lily Yap, Ah Mun Young, Peggy Young.)

MK: Since this was the first time you were teaching in a local school here, what were your thoughts about teaching back then?

EC: Well, I had to get used to the language. I found it a little difficult that sometimes I couldn't understand. (Chuckles) But I soon got on to it.

MK: I know that in 1937 you started teaching at Farrington High School and you taught there till the mid-1950s or so. How and why did you move on over to Farrington?

EC: Well, Mr. Vance was made principal of the new school and he picks the teachers he wanted to go with him. That's how I went. He wanted me to go.

MK: What did Farrington High School look like that first year?

EC: Well, the band rehearsed in a one-room shack way off to one side on the grounds. We barely got into it. We even had to sit on the window sills. Didn't have room for chairs in the place. That's where we were. Conditions were pretty bad as far as schoolrooms were concerned. And then, during the war, when they took over the main building, they put up temporary buildings. Our cafeteria, that was taken over, too. We just had one little end, and we were very limited in what we got in the way of food.

MK: Were the students' activities curtailed in any way during the war years?

EC: No, not to any great extent, no.

MK: During your years at Farrington, what subjects did you teach?

EC: Well, we helped out with everything. We had to get started. So, I taught general science, business training, photography, French, band, of course, and then I helped out with the orchestra couple times when there was no teacher. And then, I had shop, mechanical drawing. (Laughs)

MK: You had to teach many subjects.

EC: (Yes).

MK: In those days, what sort of afterschool or extracurricular activities did you as a teacher participate in?

EC: Well, we had two terms, morning and afternoon. In order to keep the band going, I had both morning and afternoon. I never got extra pay for it, either. Orchestra went on, had all the plays, everything went on just the same. But lot of it was out-of-doors. We didn't have any auditorium.

MK: When it came to things like rallies, and concerts, or plays, or dances, what was your involvement in these activities?

EC: All I had to do was act as a chaperone occasionally.

MK: What are your thoughts about the children or teenagers who came to Farrington High School back in those days? From 1937 or so through the war years and the early '50s?

EC: I thought they were wonderful. They really were. We had very little trouble. We had the games. Football, baseball. We even had pistol shooting. ROTC [Reserved Officers' Training Corps].

MK: How about your fellow teachers? Who do you remember from those days?

EC: Oh, I remember them all, but I don't remember all the names. I noticed that Mrs. Keen was one of the teachers. She died last week. Yeah, I remember her. And I go to the alumni association. The annual dinner, I always go to that. And to several of the class affairs, alumni. I went to Molokai. I went to the Big Island with one group. I didn't go to the Mainland. Class of '42 was the live wire bunch.

MK: What made them the live wire bunch?

EC: I don't know why it is, but they certainly got it.

MK: As you look back on all the many students that you had, who are some of the outstanding students that you remember from Farrington?

EC: I wouldn't want to pick out anyone. But I think, that class of 1942, we were thrown together so much, you know, on account of the war. That's one reason for it. The 442nd Regiment, that band, is mostly my boys, you know. If I had a chance to go back in the Army. . . . They called me up. I was just building this house and I didn't have a door or window on it. They wanted me to go back in the Army as bandmaster. I didn't want to go and leave the house. So, I never got called again.



(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: You were just saying that during World War II you were asked to come back as a bandmaster, but because you were involved with the building of this house . . .

EC: Yes, I couldn't go.

MK: Let's see. So, during the war years, you taught at Farrington and continued to the mid-1950s. While you were a teacher at Farrington, what were some of the major changes you noticed in Kalihi?

EC: I think the housing. That changed things quite a bit. And then, they got rid of the piggeries. The piggeries used to be where the police station is now, that valley in there. That was all piggeries. And it was terrible. I was on the committee that investigated it. They finally got them out of there. That was a big change. (Laughs) Maybe the most important. And of course, quite a few new businesses.

MK: Have you noticed any changes in the people themselves or the population?

EC: Yes. It seems to be more Filipinos and more Samoans than there used to be. Lots more.

MK: Before I go on to the topic of Stevenson, as you left Farrington High School, what were your thoughts on leaving Farrington?

EC: Well, I was (rather) glad to get away. At that time, Stevenson was an English standard school. You know what that was. It was a wonderful school. I had one class in particular that I never saw anything like it. It used to be a pleasure to walk in that room in the morning. I never had better kids anywhere. I don't think there could be any better than they were. And we did all kinds of things. I used to let them take care of the---do all of the work. Sometimes I'd let them quiz me. It was just wonderful. I didn't know there could be boys and girls that were that good. And all bright. And then, of course, the school changed when they did away with the English standard. Then they all moved down from that district up there. What do they call it?

MK: Papakolea?

EC: Yes, Papakolea. When that all came in there, then the school changed.

MK: I know that you left Stevenson in 1958.

EC: Yes.

MK: Why was that?

EC: When I went Royal Hawaiian Band. Left there in the middle of the year.

MK: How did that opportunity come about?

EC: Well, there was a vacancy, and I applied for it. And that's it.

MK: You told me at one time, you needed the Board of Supervisor's approval to become bandmaster and that was not forthcoming for a while. Can you explain what happened?

EC: Well, the mayor wanted to put in the former bandmaster again and the Board of Supervisors wouldn't approve it. There was a stalemate for three months. Finally, they came up for a vote again and they all voted for me. So, the mayor had to put me in.

MK: Who was the mayor at that time?

EC: Blaisdell. Neal Blaisdell.

MK: What was the composition of the band at that time? The band members?

EC: Well, a few were Hawaiians. And several Filipinos. And couple of haoles. But there are hardly any Hawaiians left, you know.

MK: What were your duties as bandmaster?

EC: Lead the band. (Almost 400 concerts one year.)

MK: Where were the sites that the Royal Hawaiian Band . . .

EC: Well, the big thing in those days was the liners coming in down on the docks, you know. That was a big thing. That went on every week. Several times a week. And then, we had our concerts in the park. And go around to the schools. Had all kind of special jobs. Parades. Everything.

MK: What were your most memorable concert dates with the Royal Hawaiian Band during your stay there from '58 to '63?

EC: I think the one when we played the palace grounds when the vice-president came. They're going to re-enact something on March 12. They're going to have a big show at the City Hall. They want everyone who was involved to come. That's when statehood was announced, you know. They put on that show at the time. Then they marched to Kawaiahao Church. So, I've been invited to be there. I think that was a very important engagement.

MK: I know that in 1963, you retired. Why did you choose to retire at that time?

EC: Well, I always wanted to retire at seventy-five. And I stayed on another year. That's why.

MK: Since your retirement, what are your major activities?

EC: Taking care of this place. Reading.

MK: Are you still involved with some musical groups?

EC: No. And I'm very much interested in Masonry. I go to lodge meetings all the time.

MK: I know that you've lived in this home in Kalihi Valley since before World War II or started building since before World War II. Can you tell me why you chose to live up here in Kalihi Valley?

EC: Well, as I said, the man who owns the property next door, I used to come out here with him. He told me that I might be able to buy this place. This property goes way up to the top of the mountain, you know. On the other side of the highway. They took all that upper half away when they built the highway. I used to go out and look up there and see that beautiful hillside and think, "That's mine." It was such a satisfaction. Now it's gone.

MK: Can you describe how you built this house?

EC: (Chuckles) I built that workshop first and lived in that while I was building this. It took quite a while. Little by little. I didn't have much money. At one time, you could only buy five dollars worth of lumber a month. (Laughs)

MK: So, little by little, you built . . .

EC: Little by little.

MK: . . . this house together.

EC: I even went down in the docks and swept up cement that was spilled. It was hard to get cement.

MK: Can you describe the neighborhood at that time when you first moved up here?

EC: Well, there weren't many houses. There were two or three up this way, and a couple down here, and that was about all.

MK: How was the World War II period up here in the valley with restrictions?

EC: There was a battery of big howitzers up at the end of the valley. They had about fifty men. We were blacked out, of course. The boys used to drop in here in the evening. They kept me supplied in beer.

(Laughter)

EC: They used to drop in. They had no place to go, you know. We managed. I drove once and I almost--we had the blackout lights, the little slit--and I almost ran into every telephone pole on the way home. And I never went out again at night, although I was with the USO (United Service Organizations) show, too, all this time.

MK: You were?

EC: I forgot to mention that. We used to go to all of the places all around the island, put on shows. USO show. They used to bring us home. Come and get us, and bring us home. Get home, sometimes, four o'clock in the morning. Go to work, school, the next day. I couldn't do that now.

(Laughter)

EC: Yes, I forgot the USO shows.

MK: During the years after the war, how did this neighborhood change?

EC: Oh, few more houses, that's about all. It hasn't changed much. About the same.

MK: What are your feelings about having lived in this valley for so long?

EC: Well, we'd like to see them improve the road. I don't know if they ever will. For instance, the road down here, they don't know who owns some of it. One would be City and County, and the next would be some private estate, probably people all dead. It's confusing. They don't know what to do with it.

MK: So, it's been difficult then, to get this stretch of the road improved?

EC: Yes. We finally got sewer and water.

MK: About when did those conveniences come in up here?

EC: Not very long ago. No, we haven't had sewers here very long. I would say about eight, ten years, I think. Maybe not that long. I can't remember exactly.

MK: As I bring the interview to a close, what are your feelings about having come here with the Army back in the '30s and stayed here for fifty years?

EC: Well, I like it here (chuckles). Otherwise, I wouldn't have stayed. I don't think I'd like to go back to a cold climate. But I've seen so many changes. It was so much nicer years ago.



MK: What are some of the changes that you regret having occurred?

EC: I regret seeing so many highrises. Such ugly things stuck up in the air. And the traffic. And another thing is to see the rubbish all over. When I was back on the Mainland this last time, driving in Michigan, Wisconsin, you can drive for miles, you won't see any rubbish along the roads. You don't see that at all. And here, it's the worse I've ever seen. We drove way across country way to South Dakota. Same thing, no rubbish. The towns are nice and clean. Of course, I don't know about New York. It must be terrible, some places. But this is the worse I've ever seen. That's what I regret.

MK: And what would you like to see for the future? Especially up in this valley and the Kalihi area?

EC: I'd like to see nice homes, and nice street, and some kind of a park, I think, they should have.

MK: I think I'll end the interview here. And I thank you for today's interview.

EC: I hope it was all right, you get something useful.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **KALIHI: Place of Transition**

**Vol. I**

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL  
HISTORY PROJECT**

**Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawaii at Manoa**

**JUNE 1984**